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A Slingshot Aimed at HISC

For more than 30 years, the House of Representatives has allowed one of its committees—called HUAC, or House Un-American Activities Committee, until, out of sheer embarrassment, it changed its name to HISC, or House Internal Security Committee—to abuse and bully and intimidate American citizens on the pretext of exercising the congressional power to investigate. Now, at long last, a humble citizen seems slated to have a day in court against the committee—not as a mere defendant in a criminal action, accused of contempt of Congress because he resisted the committee's tyranny, but as a plaintiff in a civil suit challenging the constitutionality of the committee's charter.

The suit was brought five full years ago by Dr. Jeremiah Stamler, a well-known heart specialist and director of the Chicago Heart Disease Control Program who was ordered, for unexplained reasons, to appear before the committee. Represented by one of Chicago's most prestigious lawyers, Albert E. Jenner, senior counsel to the Warren Commission, Dr. Stamler sought to enjoin the committee from holding hearings; he complained that its subpoena to him had served of itself to injure his name and reputation. The complaint was twice dismissed by Judge Julius Hoffman—made famous since then by the trial of the Chicago 7—but a week or so ago the Supreme Court of the United States upheld a decision by the Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit that a suit can be maintained against the Attorney General and the U.S. Attorney and against committee employees if necessary. So the issue will go on trial.

There is something of romance in this individual's challenge to the Leviathan government of the United States, something akin in a way to what the shepherd, David, said to the giant Philistine, Goliath of Gath. "Then said David to the Philistine," according to the Book of Samuel, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied."

Futile it may seem. HISC has to a large extent lapsed into desuetude and is now, to tell the truth, more a nuisance than a menace. Its latest flicker of activity—devised, one supposes to relieve the somnolence of its large and costly staff—was to send letters to 179 colleges and universities asking them to list all their guest speakers for the last two years and tell how much the speakers were paid and by whom. Surely some more useful and less meddlesome entertainment could be found for the committee's hangers-on—say, raking leaves somewhere or counting dandelions.

If Dr. Stamler's slingshot can slay this Philistine committee, his five years of patient litigation and his quixotic gesture of defiance will bring a reprieve to the nation as well as to himself. In all its 30 years the committee has never been able to learn that free speech is not un-American and free political association is not a threat to internal security.